The Raiding of Donna Clotilde.

By CUTCLIFFE HYNE.

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If any one announced in the captain's room at Hallett's that a man could leave that sanctum shortly before turning-out time, and be forthwith kidnapped in the open streets of South Shields, every master mariner within hearing would have put him down contemptuously as a gratuitous liar. All opinions in the captain's room were expressed strongly, and with due maritime force of language.

The place seemed to its frequenters the embodiment of homelikeness and security. There was a faint smell of varnish in the atmosphere, and always had been, within the memory of the oldest habitue, and shipmasters came back to the odor with a sigh of pleasure, as men do return to the neighborhood of an old and unobtrusive friend. Captains met in that room who traded to all parts of the globe, talked, and soon found acquaintances in common. It was a sort of informal club, with no subscription, and an unlimited membership. The holding of a master's "ticket" was the only entrance qualification, and it was not considered polite to ask your neighbor whether he was at that moment in or out of employment.

If you were a genuine master mariner, but of an unclubable disposition, you did not go to the captain's room at Hallett's a second time, and always made it a point of getting rather red, and speaking of it rather contemptuously, when the place was mentioned afterward. If you did not hold a master's ticket, even if you were that dashing thing, a newly fledged mate, the bar maid on guard spotted you on the instant, and said "that door was private," and directed you to the smoke room down the passage.

Into this exclusive chamber Captain Owen Kettle had made his way that day after tea, and over two modest half pints of bitter beer had done his share in the talk and listening from 8 till 10:30 of the clock. He had exchanged views with other shipmasters on cargoes, crews, insurances, climates and those other professional matters which the profane world (not the shipping interest), finds so dreary, and had been listened to with deference. He was a man who commanded attention; and though you might not like what he said, you would not dream of refusing to listen to it.

That special night, however, Captain Kettle's personal views on maritime affairs were listened to with more deference than usual. A large, red-haired man swung into the captain's room some few minutes after Captain Kettle had seated himself, and after ordering his beverage and a cigar, nodded with a whimsical smile in Kettle's direction, and asked him how he liked the neighborhood of Valparaiso as a residence.

"I forget," said the little sailor, dryly enough.

"All right, captain," said the red-haired man, "don't you mind me. I never remember too much myself either. Only you did me a good turn out there, although you probably don't know it, and I'd be proud if you'd have a drink or a smoke with me now in remembrance."

"You're very polite, captain."

"Don't mention it, captain," said the red-haired man, and struck the bell. "Same? Half a pint of bitter please, miss, and one of your best fourpenny smokes."

The general talk of the captain's room, which had halted for a moment, went on again. One worthy mariner had recently failed to show a clean bill of health in Barcelona, and had been sent to do twenty days' penance at the quarantine station, which is in Port Mahon, Minorca. As a natural consequence, he wanted to give his views on Spain and Spanish government with length and bitterness, but somehow the opportunity was denied him. The red-haired man put in a sentence or two, and a question, and it was Kettle's views on the question to which the captain's room found itself listening. A salvage question was brought up by a stout gentleman in the Baltic timber trade, who was anxious to air his sentiments, but the red-haired man skilfully intervened, and "Kettle on salvage" was asked for and heard. And so on all through the evening. The red-haired man did his work cleverly, and no one resented it.

Now Kettle was a man who liked being listened to, and there is no doubt that his vanity was tickled by all this deference from his professional equals. There is no doubt also that the snug security of Hallett's lulled his usual sense of wariness, which may in part account for what happened afterwards. And so without further excuse for him, it is my painful duty to record that an hour after he left the captain's room, the little sailor was entrapped and kidnapped by what to a man of his knowledge was one of the most vulgar of artifices.

He emptied his tumbler, stood up, and said he must be going. The red-haired man looked at the round cabin clock on the wall, and mentioned that it was his time also; and together they went outside into the damp, dark main street of South Shields.

"Going back to your ship, captain?" asked the big stranger.

"Why no, captain," said Kettle, "I live here, and I'm off home."

"Then I suppose I must say good night. Hope to meet you again, though. What boat are you on now, captain?"

"Well, I'm putting in a bit of a spell ashore, just now, captain. Fact is, I haven't come across any employment quite to my taste lately. 'Tisn't every shipowner I care to serve under."

"No," said the red-haired man. "They are brutes most of them. But look here, captain, there's no offense in my getting you the refusal of a berth, would there?"

Kettle flushed. "Captain," he said, "you're very good. You see, I'm married, with children, and I've never earned enough to put anything by. Between men, I don't mind telling you I'm on my beamends. If I can't get hold of an advance note this week, it will mean going to the pawnshop for Mrs. Kettle's next Sunday's dinner."

The red-haired man sighed. "Well, captain," he said, "you needn't thank me. It's just my duty to my employees to put this thing in your way. But we'll not speak of it here in the open. Come along off to my steamboat."

"Right," said Kettle. "Where have you got her?"

"She's lying at a buoy in the river. We can get a boat from the steps."

Nothing much more was said between them then. The big, red-haired man seemed indisposed for further talk, and Kettle was too proud to ask questions. Together they walked with their short seaman's stride down the wet new streets of the seaport, and Captain Kettle made his brain ache by hoping that this would not be another item to add to his long list of disappointments. He had not earned a day's wages for six months, and he was in such straits for want of money that he was growing desperate.

They got down to the steps and took a waterman's boat; turned up the piece of plank which lay in the stern sheets and sat on the dry side; and then pushed off into the dark river. The red-haired man picked up the yoke lines, and steered the boat amongst the dense shipping; past tiers of coasting schooners, and timber droghers, and out-of-work clinker-built tugs; past ungainly iron steam tramps, fishing craft, dredgers and the other resting traffic of the Tyne; and finally rounded up under a frieze of sterns and ran alongside the gangway of a 200-ton steam yacht.

"Hullo!" said Kettle, "pleasure?"

"Well, hardly that," said the red-haired man. "Step aboard, captain, and I'll pay off the waterman."

"He'd better wait to take me ashore again."

"No; let him go. We may have a long talk. I'll put you ashore in one of my own boats when you go. Now, captain, here we are. Come below in my room."

"You've got steam up, I see," said Kettle, as they walked aft along the white wet decks.

"My orders," said the red-haired man.

"Sail soon?"

"May start any minute. We never know. My owner's a rare one for changing mind."

"Huh!" said Kettle. "Might be a woman."

"Devilish, like a woman," said the red-haired man, dryly. He opened a door at the foot of the companionway, and turned an electric light switch. "This is my room, captain, step right in. A drop of whisky would be a good thing to keep out the cold whilst we talk. Excuse me a minute while I go and get a couple of tumblers. I guess the steward's turned in."

Kettle seated himself on a velvet-covered sofa, and looked round at the elaborate fittings of the cabin. "Satin wood panels," he commented, "nickel battens to put the charts on, glass-backed bookcase and silk bunk curtains; no expense spared anywhere. Lord! who wouldn't sell a farm and go to sea? But the old man said she wasn't pleasure! I wonder what his game is? Contraband, I guess; many a yacht's great on that. Well, anyway, I've got to hear."

The red-haired man came back with two half filled tumblers and a water jug. "Here's the poison," said he. "Mix it according to your own weight."

"That's rather more than my usual whack," said Kettle, eying the tumbler, "but it's a cold, wet night, so here's— By the way captain, I'm afraid I've forgotten your name!"

"My name?" said the red-haired man. "O, yes, I'm Douglas, Captain Douglas."

"Captain Douglas," said Kettle, thoughtfully. "No, I can't say I recall it at present. Well, sir, anyway, here's your very good health and prosperity."

"Same," said the red-haired man, and absorbed his whisky and water with the dexterity of an artist. Out of politeness, Captain Kettle finished his tumbler also; there is an etiquette about these matters.

Silence filled the cabin for a minute or so, broken only by the distant clatter of a shovel on a firebar, and Kettle looked at the cabin clock. It was 11:30, and Mrs. Kettle would be expecting him home. "Hullo!" he said, "firing up? O, I suppose you've got to keep steam in the donkey boiler whilst you're in the harbor to run your dynamo. By the way, you were talking about some employment you could put in my way, captain," he added suggestively.

"Employment," said Douglas uneasily. "O, was I? Employment—yes, to be sure. Well, you see, captain, it was my owner I was speaking for, and I've been thinking it over, and perhaps, on the whole, you'd better see her for yourself."

"Her!" said Kettle. "Is there a woman at the head of this concern?"

"A lady, call her. But look here, captain, you're getting sleepy. Why not turn in here for the night, and see her yourself in the morning?"

Kettle yawned and his head nodded. "I am sleepy, and that's a fact, though I don't know why I should be. But it wouldn't do for me to turn in here for the night. Mrs. Kettle's expecting me at home, and I've never broken word to her since I was married. I should take it as kind, captain, if you could give me some notion about this piece of employment now, so that I could see whether it's worth"— He yawned again and struggled with his heavy eyelids. "You must understand, please, captain, that time is scarce with me. I must get employment at once. I can't stand by and see my missis and youngsters hungry."

Captain Douglas swore and hit the table with his fist. "It's beastly hard," he said, "and I hate myself for bringing you here."

"What's that noise overhead?" said Kettle. "What are your crew doing on deck?" He tried to rise, but fell back stupidly on the sofa. A harsh bell clanged from somewhere beneath and the slop of water came to him through the yacht's side. "She's swinging round in the stream and someone's rung 'standby' to the engine room."

"Sounds like it," the red-haired man admitted.

Again Kettle tried to rise, and, with an immense effort tottered to his feet, but he had been given a drug too powerful for even his iron will to fight against, and he swayed, and then pitched helplessly sideways to the carpet.

The last flickering gleams of consciousness were passing away from him, but the truth of what had happened had flashed upon him at last. "Shanghaied," he murmured; "by St. James, yes, shanghaied; that's what this means. Well, I pity the man that shanghaied me. By—James—yes." He breathed stentorously a time or two more, as though trying to get out other words, and then dropped off into a deathly stupor.

Then the door of the state room crooked slyly open and the red-haired man started violently. He turned and saw a tall, dark woman just crossing the threshold. "Donna Clotilde!" he said nervously. "I thought you were ashore. Then it was by your orders—"

"That the yacht was got under weigh? Si senor. I saw you come on board with the man we have been hunting for these last two years and as soon as the pair of you got below I sent word to the mate to call all hands and get out of the Tyne as soon as the pilot could manage it—" She knelt beside Kettle's prostrate body and passed her hand caressingly over his damp forehead. "You are sure you have not overdone it?" she asked.

"I am sure of nothing like that," he answered grimly. "But I gave the dose you measured out yourself; so what's done is your own affair. I only added enough whisky to drown the taste and the poor little beggar drank it all down at one mouthful."

"I don't see you need pity him much. He will be all right when he wakes."

"When he wakes it will be at sea and I have heard him speak of his wife and kids. That's why I pity him, Donna Clotilde. Incidentally, I'm a bit sorry for myself." He stooped over the prostrate man and took a revolver from the back pocket of his trousers. "Look there! You see the fellow took a gun with him, even to Hallett's. It's grown to be a habit with him. He's a dead shot, too, and doesn't mind shooting."

"I didn't think you were a coward?"

"You know quite well I'm not, senorita. But this Captain Kettle will remember that I was the fellow that decoyed him on board and he'll be pretty anxious to square up the account when he wakes."

"You are well paid on purpose to cover any risks," said the woman with some contempt.

"And I shall be earning my pay," said the red-haired man, doggedly. "This small person here's a holy terror. Well, I must be getting on deck to see the pilot take her down the river. Here, I'll put him on the bed before I go. He'll sleep it off more comfortably there."

"You shall not touch him," said Donna Clotilde. "I will do all that's needful. I have waited for this moment for three long years."

"Well, you must be pretty keen on him, if you can sit by him, when he does not know you."

"I have loved him since the first moment we met and he knows it and I do not mind who else knows it also. I am entirely without shame in the matter; I glory in it; I am not one of your cold-blooded European women."

"Well," he said, "you're paying me to run this yacht, and I must be off to see the pilot takes her out of the river without losing us any paint." And he went out of his room and left Donna Clotilde La Touche alone with this man by whom she was so fiercely attracted.

The yacht steamed out between Tyne pierheads and the pilot left her in the coble which had been towing stern first alongside. Her destination was the Mediterranean, but she did not port her helm at once. Instead she held on straight out into the North sea and then turned off to make the Mediterranean north about—that is, through the Pentland and round Scotland. She kept clear of Ireland also, making a course for herself through the deeper wildernesses of the North Atlantic, avoiding the north and south traffic of the bay, and in fact sighting scarcely a single vessel till the red-haired man at last starboarded his helm and put her east for the straits.

The voyage was not one of monotony. Captain Kettle lay for the first twenty-four hours in a state of snoring unconsciousness, and when he did come to his wits again found himself in a cabin alone. He got up and stretched. His limbs were heavy and languid, but he was not conscious of having received any hurt. He clapped a hand to the region of his loins and nodded his grim head significantly. His pistol was missing. He looked in the glass and saw that his face above the red torpedo beard was drawn and white, and that his eyes were framed in black, dissipated looking rings. There was an evil taste in his mouth, too, which even a bottleful of water did not allay. However, all of these were minor details; they might be repaired afterwards. His first requirement was revenge on the man who had lured him aboard.

His natural instincts of tidyness made him go through the ceremony of toilet, and then he put on his cap, and, spruce and pale, went out through the luxurious cabin and passageways of the yacht and found his way on deck.

The time was night, the cold air was full of moonshine and fortune favored him insomuch that the red-haired man whom he sought was himself standing a watch. He walked up to him without any concealment, and then, swift as light, slung out his right fist, sending every ounce of his weight after it, and caught the red-haired man squarely on the peak of the jaw.

The fellow went down as if he had been poleaxed and Kettle promptly on top of him. The three other hands of the watch on deck were coming fast to their big captain's assistance and Kettle made the most of his time. He had been brought up in a school where he was taught to hit hard and hit first and keep on hitting, and, moreover, he was anatomically skilled enough to know where to hit with most effect. He had no time then for punctilious fighting; he intended to mark his man in return for value received and he did it. Then the three lusty deck hands of the watch came up and wrenched him off and held him for their officer in turn to take vengeance on.

Kettle stood in their grip, panting and pale and exultant.

"You great, ugly, red-polled beggar," he said, "I've made your face match your head, but you needn't thank me for it. You'd dare to shanghai me, would you? By James, I'll make your ship a perfect hell till I'm off it."

"You hit a man when he's not looking."

"Liar," said Kettle. "You saw me plain enough. If you were half a sailor you'd never have been hit."

"You're half my size. I couldn't fight you."

"Tell your hands to set me adrift and try."

The big man was tempted, but he swallowed down his inclination. He ordered the men who were holding Captain Kettle to set him free and go away forward again and then he thrust his own fists resolutely in his pockets. "Now," he said, when they were alone, "I'll own up to having earned what you've given me and I hope that'll suit you, for, by Jove, if it doesn't I'll shoot you like a rat with your own gun. You've handled me in a way no other man has done before and so you can tickle your pride with that and simmer down. If you want to know I was a man like yourself, hard up; and I was paid to kidnap you and I'd have kidnapped the devil for money just then."

"I know nothing about the devil," said Kettle, acidly, "but you've got me and you couldn't very well find a worse bargain. If you are not a fool you will set me ashore at once."

"I shall act entirely by my owner's orders."

"Then trot out your owner and I'll pass the time of day with him next. I'm not particular. I'll kill the whole blooming ship's company if I don't get my own way."

"Man, don't be a fool. You can't hit a woman."

"A woman?"

"Yes; I told you before. Donna Clotilde. You know her well enough."

"Donna Clotilde who?"

"La Touche."

The stiffening seemed suddenly to go out of the little man. He stepped wearily across the deck, and leaned his elbows on the yacht's polished topgallant rail. "By James," he murmured to the arch of the night, "by James, that—that woman. What a ruddy mess." And then he broke off into dreary musing. He had known this Donna Clotilde La Touche before; had entered her revolutionary schemes by capturing a war ship for her. In return she had conceived a mad infatuation for him. But all the while he regarded her merely as his employer. In the end he had been practically set adrift at sea in an open boat as a penance for not divorcing his own wife and marrying her. And now she was come to add to his other troubles by beginning to persecute him again. It was hard, bitterly hard.

By some subtle transference of thought, the woman in her berth below becoming conscious of his regard, grew restless, woke, got more restless, dressed, came on deck and saw this man with whom she was so fiercely enamored staring gloomily over the bulwarks. With her lithe silent walk she stepped across the dewy decks under the moonlight, and without his hearing her, leaned on the rail at his side, and flung an arm across his shoulders.

Captain Kettle woke from his musing with a start, stepped coldly aside, and saluted formally. He had an eye for a good-looking woman, and this one was deliciously handsome; he was always chivalrous towards the other sex, whatever might be their characters; but the fact of his own kidnapping at the moment of Mrs. Kettle's pressing need, made him almost as hard as though a man stood before him as his enemy.

"Miss La Touche," he said, "do you wish me to remember you with hatred?"

"I do not wish you to have need to remember me at all. As you know, I wish you to stay with me always."

"That, as I told you before, miss, is impossible, for more reasons than one. You have done me infinite mischief already. I might have found employment by this time had I stayed in South Shields, and meanwhile my wife and children are hungry. Be content with that and set me ashore."

"I repeat the offer I made you in South America. Come with me, get a divorce, and your wife shall have an income such as she never dreamed of, and such as you never could have got her in all your life otherwise. You know I am not boasting. As you must know by this, I am one of the richest women in the world."

"Thank you, but I do not accept the terms. Money is not everything."

"And meanwhile, remember, I keep you on board here, whether you like it or not, and until you give way to what I want, your wife may starve. So if she and your children are in painful straits you must recollect that it is entirely your fault."

"Quite so," said Kettle. "She will be content to starve when she knows the reason."

Donna Clotilde's eyes began to glitter.

"There are not many men who would refuse if I offered them myself."

"Then, miss, I must remain curious."

She stamped her foot. "I have hungered for you all this time, and I will not give you up for mere words. You will come to love me in time as I love you. I tell you you will, you must, you shall. I have got you now, and I will not let you go again."

"Then, miss," said Kettle grimly, "I shall have to show you that I am too hot to hold."

She faced him with heaving breasts. "We will see who wins," she cried.

"Probably," said Captain Kettle, and took off his cap. "Good night, miss, for the present. We know how we stand; the game appears to begin between us from now."

He turned deliberately away from her, walked forward, and went below; and after a little waiting Donna Clotilde shivered and went back to her own luxurious state room.

But if she was content to spend the rest of the night in mere empty longing, Captain Kettle was putting his time to more practical use. He was essentially a man of action.

Cautiously he found his way to the steward's store room, filled a case with meat tins and biscuit, and then coming on deck again, stowed it away in the lifeboat which hung in davits out board without being noticed. With equal success he took the boat's breaker forward, filled it from a water tank, and got it fixed on its chocks again still without being seen. The moon was behind clouds, and the darkness favored him. He threw down the coils of the davit on deck, cast off one from where it was belayed, took a turn, and carried the bight to the other davit so that he could lower away both tackles at once.

But he was not allowed to get much further. The disused blocks screamed like a parcel of cats as the ropes rendered through them; there was a shrill whistle from the officer of the watch and half a dozen men from various parts of the deck came bounding along to interfere.

Captain Kettle let go both falls to overhaul as they chose, and picked up a greenheart belaying pin out of the pin rail and stood on the defensive. But the forward fall kinked and jammed, and though the little man fought like a demon to keep off the watch till he got it clear, they were too many for him, and drove him to the deck by sheer weight of numbers. He had cracked one man's forearm in the scuffle, laid open another's face and smashed in the front teeth of a third, and they were rather inclined to treat him roughly, but the red-haired skipper came up, and by sheer superior strength picked him up, kicking and struggling, and hustled him off below, whether he liked it or no.

The lifeboat dangled, half-swamped, from the forward davit tackle, and all hands had to be piped before they could get her on board again; and by the time they had completed this job there was another matter handy to occupy their attention. A fireman came up from below, white-faced and trembling.

"YOU ARE SURE YOU HAVE NOT OVERDONE IT?" SHE ASKED.

"The yacht's half full of water!" he said.

Now that their attention was called to it, they noticed the sluggish way she rode the water.

"She must have started a plate or something," the fireman went on excitedly. "We got both bilge pumps running, and they won't look at it. The water's coming in like a sluice."

"Carpenter," sung out the red-haired man, "come below with me and see if we can find anything," and he led the way to the companion. Between decks they could hear the water slopping about under the flooring. It seemed a bad, an almost hopeless case.

Instinctively the red-haired man went to his own room to pocket his valuables, and by a chance he was moved to lift up the door of the floor which covered the bath beneath it. Ah, there was the mischief. The sea cock which filled the bath was turned on to the full, and the iron tub was gushing water on every side. The next state room was empty, but the bath cock there was also turned on to the full; and after going round the ship and finally entering Kettle's room (and covering him with a revolver), and turning off his water supply, he found that the sea had been pouring inboard from no less than eight separate apertures.

"And this is your work, you little devil, I suppose," said the red-haired man savagely.

"Certainly," said Captain Kettle. "Shoot me if you like, put me ashore if you choose, but don't grumble if you find me a deuced ugly passenger. I'm not in the habit of being made to travel where I don't wish."

That afternoon Kettle contrived to set the yacht afire, in three separate places, and a good deal of damage was done (and night had fallen again) before the sacred crew managed to extinguish the flames; and this time Donna Clotilde intervened. She asked for Kettle's parole that he would attempt no further mischief; and when this was flatly refused, incontinently put him in irons. The lady was somewhat tigerish in her affections.

A second time Captain Kettle managed to get the yacht in a blaze, at the imminent peril of immolating himself, and then from lack of further opportunity to make himself obnoxious, lay quiet in his lair till such time as the yacht would of necessity go into harbor to coal. The exasperated crew would cheerfully have murdered him if they had been given the chance, but Donna Clotilde would not permit him to be harmed. She was a young woman, who, up to this, had always contrived to have her own way, and she firmly believed that she would tame Kettle in time.

THE FELLOW WENT DOWN AS IF HE HAD BEEN POLEAXED.

When the yacht passed the straits she had only four days' more coal on board and the executive (and Kettle) expected that she would go into Gibraltar and lay alongside a hulk to rebunker. But Donna Clotilde had other notions. She had the yacht run down the Morocco coast and brought to an anchor. So long as she had Captain Kettle in her company upon the waters she did not vastly care whether she was moving or at a standstill.

"You cannot escape me here," she said to him when the cable had roared from the house pipe and the dandy steamer, had swung to a rest. "The yacht is victualled for a year and I can stay here as long as you choose. You had far better be philosophical and give in. Marry me now and liking will come afterward."

Kettle looked at the tigerish love and resentment which blazed from her black eyes and answered with cold politeness that time would show what happened, though, to tell the truth, indomitable though he was as a general thing, he was at that time feeling that escape was almost impossible. And so for the while he more or less resigned himself to captivity.

Under the baking blue of a Mediterranean sky this one-sided courtship progressed, Donna Clotilde alternating her ecstacies of fierce endearment by paroxysms of invective and Kettle enduring both in equal coldness and immobility. The crew of the yacht looked on stolidly non-interferent and were kept by their officers at cleaning and painting as necessary occupiers of the mind. But one or other of them, of their own free will, always kept an eye on their guest, whether he was on deck or below. He had given them a wholesome taste of his quality and they had an abject dread of what he might be up to next if he was left alone. They quite understood that he would destroy the yacht and all hands if by doing so he could regain his personal liberty.

But others, it seems, besides those already mentioned in this narrative, were taking a lively interest in the smart yacht and her people. She was at anchor in the bay off the Riff coast and the gentry who inhabited the beach villages, and the villages in the hills behind the beach, had always looked upon anybody and anything they could grab as their just and lawful prey. The sultan of Morocco, the war ships of France, Spain and elsewhere and the emissaries of other powers had time after time endeavored to school them in the science of civilization without effect, and so they still remain today, the only regular practicing pirates in the western world.

The yacht was sighted first from the hills; was reported to the beach villages, and was reconnoitered under cover of night by a tiny fishing boat. The report was pleasing, and word went round. Bearded brown men collected at an appointed spot, each with the arms to which he was best accustomed, and when darkness fell four large boats were run down to the feather edge of the surf. There was no indecent hurry. They did their work with method and carefulness, like men who are used to it, and they arrived alongside the yacht at 3 a. m. and confidently expected to take her by surprise.

But the crew of the yacht, thanks to Captain Kettle's vagaries, were not in the habit of sleeping over soundly; they never knew what piece of dangerous mischief their little captive might turn his willing hand to next; and, as a consequence, when the anchor watch sung out his first alarm, not many seconds elapsed before every man aboard was on deck. The yacht was well supplied with revolvers and cutlasses, and half a minute sufficed to get these up from below and distributed, so that when the Riffians attempted to board the defenders were quite ready to do them battle.

Be this how it may, however, there is no doubt as to which side got the first advantage. The yacht's low foreboard made but a small obstacle to a climber from the large boats alongside, and neither the deckhands nor the stokehold crew were any of them trained fighting men. In their 'prentice hands the kicking revolvers threw high, and were only useful as knuckledusters, and till they had thrown them down and got their cutlasses into play they did hardly any execution to speak about. The Riff men, on the other hand, had been bred and born in the atmosphere of skirmish, and made ground steadily.

At an early point of the scuffle Captain Kettle came on deck with a cigar in his mouth and hands in his pockets, and watched matters with a critical interest, but did not offer to interfere one way or the other. It was quite a new sensation to him to watch an active fight without being called upon to assist or arbitrate.

And then came up from below Donna Clotilde la Touche, dressed and weaponed, and, without a bit of hesitation, flung herself into the turmoil. She saw Kettle standing on one side, but neither beseught nor commanded him. She would have died sooner than ask for his help and then be met with a refusal.

Into the melee she went, knife and pistol, and there is no doubt that her example and the fury of her rush animated the yacht's crew, and made them stronger to drive the wall of their assailants back. To give Donna Clotilde her due, she was as brave as the bravest man and moreover she was a certain shot at moderate range. But after her revolver was empty, and the press closed around her, it was not long before an expert hand twisted the knife from her grasp, and then the end came quickly. An evil-smelling man noted her glorious beauty and marked her out as his especial loot. He clapped a couple of sinewy arms around her and bore her away toward the bulwarks and his boat.

Some one had switched on the electric deck lights and the fight was in a glow of radiance. Everything was to be clearly seen. Donna Clotilde was being dragged, resisting, along the decks, and Kettle looked on placidly, smoking his cigar. She was heaved upon the bulwarks. In another moment she would be gone from his path forever.

Still her lips made no sound, though her great black eyes were full of wild entreaty. But the eyes were more than Kettle could stand. He stooped and picked up a weapon from among the litter on deck and rushed forward and gave a blow and the ruffian dropped limply, and Donna Clotilde stood by the yacht's bulwarks, breathless and gasping.

"Now you get away below," he ordered, curtly. "I'll soon clear this rabble over the side."

He watched to see her obey him and she did it meekly. Then he gave his attention to the fight. He broke a packet of cartridges which lay on the deck planks, picked up and loaded a revolver and commenced to make himself useful to the yacht's crew, and from that moment the fortune of the battle turned.

Captain Owen Kettle was (and is) a beautiful fighter and this was just his fight. Against his cool-headed ferocity the Riffians gave way like sand before waves. He did not miss a blow, he did not waste a shot; all his efforts went home with the deadliest effect. His voice, too, was a splendid ally. The yacht's crew had been doing their utmost already; they had been fighting for their bare lives. But with Kettle's poisonous tongue to lash them they did far more; they raged like wild beasts at the brown men who had invaded their sacred decking and drove them back with resistless fury.

"Hump yourselves, you lazy dogs," Kettle shouted. "Keep them on the move. Drive them over the bows. Murder those you can reach. Am I to do all this job myself? Come on, you mongrels."

The red cutlasses stabbed and hacked, and the shrieks and yells and curses of the fight grew to a climax, and then the Riffians, with a sudden panic, gave way, and ran for the side, and tumbled over into their boats. There was no quarter asked or given. The exasperating yachtsmen cut down all they could reach, even whilst they were escaping; and when the sound had gone, they threw after them the wounded to be rescued or lost as they chose. Afterwards, having a moment's respite, they picked up their revolvers again, loaded them, and kept up a spattering ill-aimed fire till the boats were out of reach. Then, when they turned to look after their own killed and hurt, they found a new crisis awaiting them.

Captain Kettle was on the top of the deck house, which served as a navigating bridge, ostentatiously closing up the breach of his revolver after reloading it. He wished for a hearing, and after what they had seen of his deadly markmanship they gave it to him without demur. His needs were simple. He wanted steam as soon as the engineers could give it to him, and he intended to take the yacht into Gibraltar right away. Had anybody any objection to raise?

The red-haired man made himself spokesman. "We should have to go to Gib anyway," said he. "Some of us want a doctor badly, and three of us want a parson to read the funeral service. Whether you can get ashore once we do run into Gib, captain, is your own concern."

"You can leave that to me safely," said Captain Kettle. "It will be something big that stops me from having my own way now."

The men dispersed about their duties, the decks were hosed down, and the deck lights switched off. After awhile Donna Clotilde came gliding up out of the darkness, and stepped up the ladder to the top of the deck house. Kettle regarded her uneasily.

To his surprise she knelt down, took his hand and smothered it with burning kisses. Then she went back to the head of the ladder. "My dear," she said, "I will never see you again. I made you hate me, and yet you saved my life. I wish I thought I could ever forget you."

"Miss La Touche," said Kettle, "you will find a man in your own station one of these days to make you a proper husband, and then you will look back at this cruise and think how lucky it was you so soon sickened and kicked me away from you."

She shook her head and smiled through her tears. "You are generous," she said. "Goodbye, my darling. Goodbye."

Then she went down the ladder, and Captain Kettle never saw her again.

A quartermaster came up and took the wheel. The windlass engine had been clacking, and the red-haired (who had constituted himself temporary mate), called out from forward, "All gone."

"Quartermaster," said Kettle.

"Yessir," said the quartermaster.

"Nor'-nor'west and by west."

"Nor'-no'west, n'o'west it is, sir," said the quartermaster briskly.

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